

EUROPEAN RAILS OF PEACE PROJECT

The Project

The purpose of this project is to provide 90 youth selected in an equal number from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia with visas and sponsorship to travel throughout Europe, in order to help them to connect, through dialogue and shared experiences, with peers from communities previously engaged in conflict as well as peers from EU member countries. A second objective is to help these youth to break through the political and economic challenges of their regions and be provided with the same opportunity to travel around Europe that many of their European peers enjoy. As these regions of Europe are in the process of entering the EU, the project will provide young people and future decision-makers with an opportunity to meet and promote sustainable and peaceful coexistence within European borders and in their local communities.

Background

In the past decade, the resurrection of old ethnic and religious clashes in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia Kosovo, and Serbia, ignited a string of violent conflicts in the Balkans area. The region went through a sequence of painful civil wars which lead to widespread violence, destruction and extensive population displacement. As a result of these conflicts, residents of all ethnicities lost jobs, income and educational opportunities. Currently, the situation of the region is stabilized, but the roots of the conflict need to be addressed in order to prevent the recurrence of violence and war. Representing the majority of the Balkan's state population, young people are eager to escape the cycle of conflict and ensure a prosperous future for the new generation, but they do require concrete support to build their capacity in order to contribute openly to a better future. The current generation of 15- to 26-year-olds is on the leading edge of the transition: their societies were undergoing great turmoil including war and political and economic instability while they were going through their own personal development. Young people in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia, even the most highly educated, still find their lives constrained by effects of the war, such as political instability and high unemployment rates. Many of the most educated and skilled young people emigrate creating a "brain-drain" effect which deprives their local communities of the human capital and resources that are critical to a sustainable social, economic and political development of the region. For now, citizens from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia need visas to travel through the EU. Recent statistics have shown that the vast majority of youth in the Balkans have never left the country, and many of them do not have passports at all.

This project builds on the premises and outcomes of previous initiatives, such as:

- The 'Traveling throughout Europe' project (www.euroini.org), organized in Serbia in 2005 by the European Movement in Serbia (www.emins.org.yu) and the Austrian embassy, in order to provide visas and sponsorship travel for 100 top Serbian students.
- The 'Dealing with the past' project, organized by the Humanitarian Law Center (www.hlc.org.yu) aims to gather students and activists from Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia to discuss the issues of post-war conflict resolution and mechanisms of transitional justice and reconciliation.
- The Glocal Youth Parliament (GYP) of the Glocal Forum, a worldwide network of urban youth partnering with local governments and organizations, international institutions and the private sector to improve the quality of urban life. The GYP currently spans sixty-five cities including Belgrade, Pristina and Sarajevo, and has a core membership of two youth representatives from each participating city in addition to their peer networks. The GYP promotes local action, city-to-city initiatives and the sharing of ideas, solutions, and experiences to develop innovative approaches to urban problems and realize their common vision for the year 2020. The Glocal Youth Parliamentarians (GYPs) from Belgrade, Pristina and Sarajevo, as well as those from Rome and other Western European cities, will participate in the project.

Project Objectives

The initiative was designed to reinforce peaceful cooperation among youth from regions previously engaged in conflict by providing them with an opportunity to share their ideas, knowledge and experiences related to past conflict and future peace-building, and also to travel through Europe. The objectives of the project are:

- Promote tolerance and respect for diversity at all levels of society by connecting young people from diverse cultural, confessional and ethnic groups
- Help Balkan youth to break through the social and economic challenges of their regions and provide them with the opportunity to travel around Europe, as their European peers have
- Promote education and academic success as values in a situation where their market value is underrated; give credit and support to skilled youth and facilitate peer-to-peer skill sharing; help them increase their skills and encourage them to be engines to promote the economic, political and social development of their local communities
- Give future decision-makers a chance to get first-hand experience in the EU countries, and promote ideas of peace, openness to diversity and shared European identity among the Balkans' young population
- Connect Balkan youth with their peers from around the world through the Balkan members of the Glocal Youth Parliament (GYP), thereby increasing the reach of their project experience
- Promote mobility and sustainable tourism as a vehicle of dialogue and a resource of prosperity for local communities and understanding between populations
- Promote city-to-city relations and cooperation among the Municipalities of Belgrade, Pristina and Sarajevo and select EU Municipalities
- Promote peer-to-peer knowledge and experience sharing among young citizens across the divides to help them find a common ground to promote peaceful coexistence and development within and among their local communities.



• Innovation and Added Value of the Project

What makes this project innovative and value-adding is:

- Creation of a coalition bringing together municipal, public and private sector players and NGOs
- Creation of a link between peacebuilding, city-to-city relations and sustainable tourism
- Increase of the network of youth exchange by connecting young citizens from formerly warring communities and sharing their experience with peers from all over the world through the Glocal Youth Parliament (GYP) network.

• Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes of this project are:

- Broadened perspectives and understanding and respect for diversity of youth in a post conflict region thereby reinforcing peaceful cooperation and respect for their peers from different national, confessional and ethnic groups
- Links established among youth from the Balkans and links between them and their peers from Europe and worldwide through the GYP network of the Glocal Forum
- Increased level of trust towards the EU integration process among young citizens of the Balkan region
- Facilitated access to otherwise hard-to-come-by resources and spaces
- Increased motivation for top students to stay in their country in the form of recognition and support from their Municipalities to increase their skills and get involved in international peace projects such as this one
- Increased self confidence, networking and organizational skills

Project Activities

- - One month travel by train through Europe with Interrail pass for 90 young citizens selected in equal number from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia. The trip will take place from end of July to end of August 2006
- A workshop will be organized just before the beginning of the trip, in order to discuss young Balkan citizens' perspective on the current status of post conflict social, political and economic reconstruction in their region, and how they see ways for Europe and the international community to support this process.
- Possible welcome by the Mayor of the city hosting the workshop.
- Two follow-up meetings among the youth involved in the project will be suggested to take place in select European cities during the one-month trip (the possibility for a visit to the EU institutions in Brussels and access to a European summer music festival is being explored)
- The youth will create materials on the theme "European Rails of Peace" in order to express and collect their thoughts, experiences and lessons learned from the project. The material will be in web-based, like a specific online blog, as well as in hard copy, photographic or otherwise. The documentation will be collected at the end of the trip, compiled and circulated to the participants and partners of the project, as well as will be shared with other Balkan youth as well as with the international members of the Glocal Youth Parliament (GYP).
- Upon return, the youth can be linked to the GYP youth network through the Balkan GYPs.

Visibility Opportunities for Project Partners

The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, the Austrian Government and Thomas Cook already support the project.

The partners to the project, according to their contributions, will benefit as follows in terms of visibility from their participation to the project:

- Visibility of the logo and name of the company in the Glocal Forum newsletter. The newsletters are published every three months and are currently sent to more than 130 Mayors and Deputy-Mayors of the Glocal Forum network, 130 chairman, managers and CEOs of private sector companies, and almost 100 World Bank and United Nations agencies contacts, as well as 80 NGOs, universities and public sector contacts
- Visibility of the logo on the Glocal Forum website in the specific project page. The Glocal Forum website (www.glocalforum.org) is viewed daily by 7,000 users and 34,000 monthly
- Visibility on the Development Gateway portal founded by the former President of the World Bank, Mr. James Wolfensohn, in the pages "Glocalization" (www.developmentgateway.org/glocalization) and "Youth" (www.developmentgateway.org/youth),. The focus pages on Glocalization and Youth on the Development Gateway portal have over 20,000 registered users
- Visibility of the logo in the blog that will be open in the framework of this project for the youth participating in the initiative to write online contributions and keep in touch during their Inter-rail experience
- Visibility on the eCities website (www.ecitiesnetwork.org) where the Glocal Forum's network of cities participate and can link their institutional site to the eCities portal
- Launch of the "European Rail of Peace" project during the Glocal Forum's Fifth Annual Glocalization Conference in Ankara, June 30-July 3, 2006
- Visibility of the logo on the website of the Cultural Association Travels and Freedom (www.inter-rail.it), which has an average of 1,500 daily visitors and almost 6,500 registered users, mostly Italians between 17 and 30 years-old, with 15,000-30,000 pages visited every day
- Presentation of the project during the next biannual meeting of the Cultural Association Travels and Freedom, in Cavriglia (AR) in Italy, June 2 - 4 2006
- Visibility to be explored in Metro Italy newspaper as well as in local media in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia-Montenegro.

